

# Music and Pines

## **Fred Kuphal's music and the trees on Mount Helena flourished through years**

When Frederick William Kuphal, Jr. was a little boy in Germany, he went with his father to the village schoolhouse where the schoolmaster was giving singing lessons. Fred told his mother later, "He took a roast goose down from the wall and stroked it with a stick, and the goose sang." Fred's love for the violin began that day and lasted all his 95 years.

The Kuphal family immigrated to Montana in 1882, to a two-room cabin four miles northeast of Helmsville. During a cold winter of 1883, they lived in the school at Helmsville. When a spring came and the roads opened, they made a new home in Helena.

Fred Sr. opened a grocery store next to Payne's Hotel, and Fred Jr. attended Hawthorne School in Helena. When Fred was 8 years old, his father purchased a violin for him and Fred took up violin studies with Professor Ewald Weber. The following year, he played the "Bluebells of Scotland" at the grand opening of the Broadwater Hotel. Several years later, on Arbor Day 1899, Kuphal accompanied Helena School children up the lightening-scorched slopes of Mount Helena. Each carried a basket with an orange and evergreen seedlings to replant the mountain. Young Kuphal serenaded them as they set to their task.

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*Kuphal, in 1960. He died in 1974 at the age of 95.*

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His father took up accounting for copper mogul William A. Clark in Butte in the interim, and upon Fred's return, his father's connections aided his career. He gave private lessons, performed at afternoon teas, was featured in a musical and gave a concert at Helena's Unitarian Church.

Upon Professor Weber's death in 1902, Fred Kuphal moved back to Helena to lead the ten-piece Ming Opera House orchestra. Kuphal's orchestra entertained at many lavish occasions, playing Mozart, Hayden and light opera at elaborate teas from behind potted ferns rented from State Nursery.

In 1908, Fred married Lillian Brennaman, a local pianist who shared a love of music and of teaching. Lillian accompanied Fred's solo performances and joined him as a well-respected and successful teacher.

They travelled for several months to Berlin in 1911 to further their own studies. Back in Helena, Lillian's health was fragile, and during the winter of 1913 she had influenza twice, much weakening her. Seeking a warmer climate per her doctor's orders, they moved to Los Angeles. Lillian never

regained her health, however, and died of pneumonia in 1917.

Fred played in Sid Grauman's Movie Theater Orchestra in Los Angeles for several months. He had played in the first Los Angeles Philharmonic when it began in 1913 but it was irregular work at best. In 1919, William A. Clark, Jr. organized a new Los Angeles Philharmonic and Kuphal joined, soon becoming personnel manager and librarian. The job lasted 40 years until Kuphal's retirement at age 80.

Fred Kuphal's music and the trees on Mount Helena flourished through the years. In the fall of 1966, the Helena City Commission officially recognized the Arbor Day Ceremony of 1899 through a formal proclamation:

*"To commemorate an event of civic love and pride of the school children who planted the trees on Arbor Day at the turn of the century after a severe forest fire reddened our skies for several days, and of the school administrators who organized the non-too-easy venture, it is hereby proclaimed that*

*the clump of trees in the ravine of Mount Helena facing our city be named the Fred Kuphal Grove in honor of the violinist who played beautiful music to lighten the task of digging holes and watering seedlings after a long trek up the mountain."*

It was further proposed that a suitable marker be erected on the site of the grove, and the children, teachers and Mr. Kuphal be recorded.

Fred Kuphal died in May of 1975 at the age of 95. In recent years, musicians from the Helena Symphony have commemorated Fred Kuphal and his contributions to Helena's music. Each year on the summer solstice, they hike to the grove and play chamber music under the trees. Though still unmarked, the grove of hundred-year-old trees stands out on Mount Helena's east-facing slope. Together, the music and the pines honor the memory of one of Helena's finest musicians.

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*Kuphal, center, returned to Helena in 1902 to lead the ten-piece Ming Opera House orchestra and the Helena High orchestra, pictured above in 1907.*

*Photos courtesy of the Montana Historical Society.*